**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

# TREE/ SHRUB PRUNING

**(Acre)**

**CODE 660**

## DEFINITION

Removing all or parts of selected branches or leaders from trees and shrubs.

## PURPOSES

- Improve the appearance of trees or shrubs, e.g., ornamental plants and Christmas trees.
- Improve the quality of wood products.
- Improve the production of plant products, e.g., nuts, fruits, boughs and tips.
- Reduce fire and/or safety hazards.
- Improve the growth and vigor of understory plants.
- Adjust the foliage and branching density for other specific intents, such as wind and snow control, noise abatement, access control, and visual screens.

## CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any area where trees or shrubs should be pruned.

## CRITERIA

### General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes.

The pruning and shearing method and timing will match the limitations of the site and soils, achieve purposes for the specific tree or shrub species, and be conducted in a safe and efficient manner.

Pruning or shearing will not adversely reduce the growth and vigor of the tree or shrub for the intended purpose. Generally the best time to prune woody plants is in late winter or early spring when the plants are still dormant. Maples (including boxelders), elms, birch, black walnuts and honeylocust will bleed if pruned in the winter. Although this does not cause harm to the trees, prune after trees are fully leafed out if this is a concern for landowners.

Trees that bloom on old wood such as forsythia, lilac, viburnum, mockorange and spirea should be pruned immediately after blooming.

Evergreens can be pruned in early spring or in early summer after any new growth has hardened. Junipers, arborvitaes and yews can be pruned anytime from mid-April to mid-August. Pruning later would likely leave unhealed wounds that could result in winter damage.

Always make pruning cuts just beyond (**See Figure 1)** a side branch or bud. Plant growth will be directed into the remaining side branch or bud. Wound dressings or pruning paints are usually not necessary except on trees or shrubs that are susceptible to bacterial diseases such as fireblight.

Debris and vegetative material left on the site after treatment will not present an unacceptable fire or pest hazard or interfere with the intended purpose and other management activities.

Comply with applicable laws and regulations including pre-activity permits, permissions, or notifications.

**Additional Criteria for Improving the Appearance of Trees and Shrubs.**

Proper pruning enhances the beauty of almost any landscape tree and shrub, while improper pruning can ruin or greatly reduce its landscape potential. Trees and shrubs in nature are seldom or never pruned and are still beautiful. It is usually better not to prune at all unless you are sure you can prune properly. If a shrub or tree's natural size and shape is carefully considered when selecting suitable species for a specific site, you may eliminate the need to prune. If pruning ornamental shrubs or trees become necessary, consult some of the references for instructions explicit to the species.

**Additional Criteria for Pruning to Improve the Quality of Wood Products.**

Remove lower branches of select loblolly, longleaf or shortleaf pine trees to permit formation of clear, knot-free wood. Prune only about 150 of the best trees per acre and only in plantations whose soils have $SI_{50}$ > 85ft. Choose best-formed trees having no crooks or forks but with smaller limbs. To avoid wasting money and time, delay pruning until after the first thinning. Ongoing economic studies suggest that there may be no advantage to pruning southern yellow pines higher than 17 feet off the ground. Beyond seventeen feet pruning becomes more difficult and costly and the increase in price obtained from higher quality knot-free wood produced does not compensate these increased costs.

Pruning is best done during the fall and winter since trees are more easily damaged during their growing season and pruning is more comfortable when done during the cooler weather.

Care must be taken to avoid injury to the stem through tearing or wounding bark during pruning. The best tool is a pruning saw. Do not use axes, hatchets or machetes. Cut branches close to the main stem to promote early healing and to prevent the formation of loose knots. The scars will be larger when the branches are cut close to the bole of the tree, but healing will be more rapid and complete than when a short stub with a wound of smaller diameter is left.

**Additional Criteria for the Production of Plant Products.**

Consult a local office of the Texas Cooperative Extension service for detailed and local needs of the specific plant species.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Pruning and shearing should be timed to minimize disturbance to seasonal wildlife activities.

Pruning and shearing tools should be disinfected to prevent the spread of pathogens.

Economic analyses are recommended before starting pruning and shearing projects.

To maintain plant growth and sustain vigor, pruning and shearing may be done in two or more timed intervals.

Time pruning and shearing to minimize potential damage to the tree bole and stems.

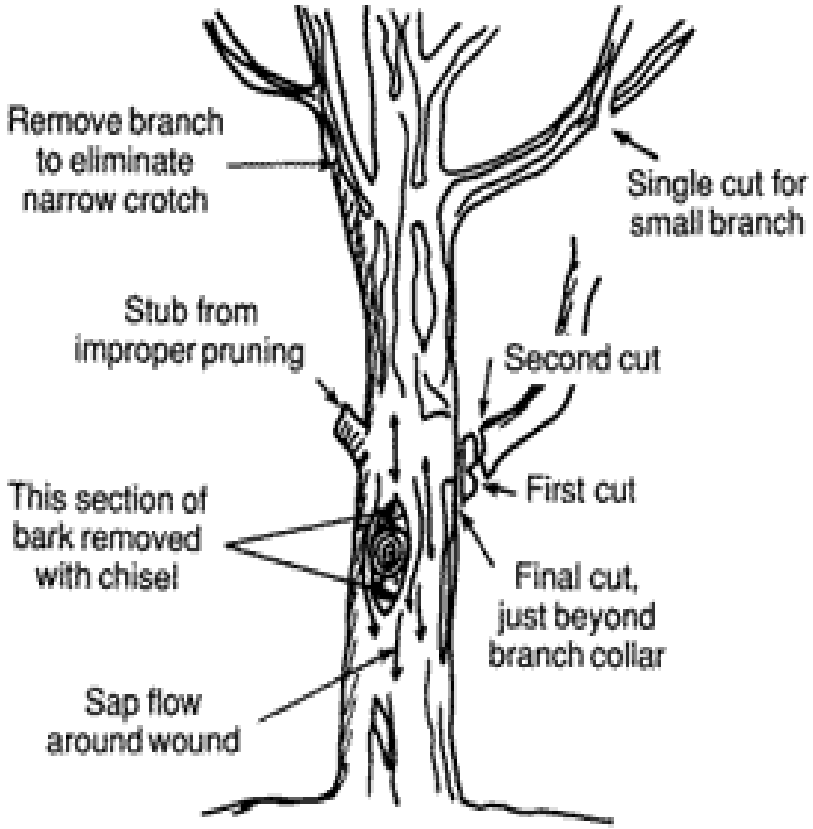
**PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

**OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Periodically inspect plant condition and take corrective actions as necessary, e.g., additional pruning, pest management, nutrient management, and forest stand improvement.

Figure 1. Pruning a Tree



**REFERENCES**

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Moorhead, D. J.; C.W. Dangerfield and J. R. Beckwith. 1998. Opportunities for Intensive Pine Plantation Management. Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia Publication 98-002. 6 pages.

Smith, R.G.; D. DeCock; R. Hill and V. Quam. 1998. Pruning Trees and Shrubs. NDSU Extension Service Publication H-1036. 4 pages.

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**APPROVAL AND CERTIFICATION**

**Tree/Shrub Pruning**
**Code 660**
**(acres)**

PRACTICE STANDARD APPROVED:

_____ _____
(State Forester) (date)

This practice standard is needed in the _____ Field Office Technical Guide.

_____ _____
NRM/DC DATE

CERTIFICATION:
Reviewed and determined adequate without need of revision.

_____ _____
(Zone Specialist) (Date)